

Sermon Outline.

THE JOY OF THE MINISTRY.

Phil. iv, 1 and 1 Thess. ii, 19.

I. INTRODUCTION.

1. Paul's feelings toward his newly planted churches in Macedonia, especially toward the church at Philippi.

(1.) He is now away from them and imprisoned in Rome. He had been forced to leave them before he was ready. Hence he always longed greatly to see them. Away from them he was lonely. He was homesick. He says himself that he felt orphaned.

(2.) They are uppermost in his thoughts. In all his prayers he remembers them and bears them before the throne of Grace. His prayers and thoughts are filled with sweet memories of grateful deeds done for him when in need, and kindly attentions for his welfare and joy. Though far away from loved ones, the thought that they love us, and that we love them, and the very longing and the hope to see them is a well of joy.

(3.) There was nothing too hard for him to do for such a people.

(a) He lived only for them. But for their salvation, their progress and their joy, he would rather "depart and be with Christ." Mother-like, he is ready to go whenever he has completed his work for his children.

(b) Though a lonely prisoner in a strange and corrupt city, he denied himself of the comfort and support of two such faithful and congenial companions as Timothy and Epaphroditus, for their sakes.

(c) He even went so far as to say he was willing to be sacrificed—to be poured out as a drink offering for them and would rejoice in such an event. So warm was his feeling for and so great, his devotion to them.

II. WHY PAUL HAD SUCH FEELINGS toward these Christians: or what they were to him.

1. His feelings toward and his devotion to them were not without reason.

(1.) He came to them first on his second missionary journey, in obedience to the call of his Master, "Come

over into Macedonia" and for the sake of him who called him.

(2.) He loves them first because they were bought with the price of his Master's blood. He loved them as he loved all Gentiles for his Savior's sake.

(3.) But now he loves them, is interested in, and devoted to them because he is their spiritual father, and because his success or his failure is bound up with their faithfulness and their growth.

2. They were his crown.

(1.) The victor in the athletic games of his times was given a crown. His crown was these Christian's, victory.

(2.) The honored guests at a festival were crowned with a wreath. They were his wreath, joy, they as his crown symbolized both his victory and joy.

(3.) This crown was one "that fadeth not away." Theirs were of leaves, his of immortal souls.

(a) Its leaves in immortal green.

(b) Its flowers in everlasting bloom.

(c) Its fragrance sweeter than the rose of Sharon.

(d) Its pearls more precious than rubies.

(4.) These disciples scattered from Antioch to Rome were a present crown.

(a) They were so many evidences of the victory of the Gospel.

(b) They were a constant source of joy in their faithfulness and progress.

3. They were his hope.

(1.) From the time he saw the glorified Christ until the day of his death his one ambition was to bring men and women out of darkness into light, out of sin into righteousness. His one hope was to see the kingdom of Christ established in this world. Every new convert and every growing Christian was so much a realization of his cherished hope. He gave up all other ambitions for this. These multiplied and still multiplying hosts of men and women living new lives were living and powerful witnesses to the power of the Gospel. They were so many victories won for God. He could see the kingdom of Satan toppling and he could see the kingdom of God spreading. He saw his hope being realized before him.

(2.) But they were not only his

present hope, they were his future hope, they were to be his crown of rejoicing in "the day of the Lord." The Lord would crown him in the presence of the assembled world with a crown of victory and of righteousness. And these Christians won from idolatry, superstition and sin would constitute its leaves, flowers and pearls. When he looked forward to that day, how their increasing numbers and growing lives filled his heart. This vision of hope is what staid him in his arduous labors, amidst persecutions and in the hour of death. In his last days this vision grew so clear that he could almost reach forward and take the crown which he saw in the hand of his glorified Lord ready to be put upon his head. No wonder he would rather depart. 2 Tim. iv, 7, 8.

4. They were his joy.

(1.) The athlete and his friends rejoiced in a fading crown—in a temporal victory.

(2.) Paul's joy too was in a crown. But a crown of righteousness. One made of righteousness lives. He rejoiced in a realized, realizing and ever to be realized hope. His joy was the highest of human joys. It was in living men and women. He rejoiced in their conversion, in their growth in grace, in their steadfastness, and in the confidences he had in their final salvation.

(3.) His joy was a joy of hope. It was real and great here. So great that he counted the ills of life nothing, yet he anticipated greater. He hoped to meet and to know them in the resurrection. There no sin, no want of time, nothing would mar their joy.

III. PAUL'S EXHORTATION.

1. Because and just because they were so much to him; great consequences depended upon them. His crown might become a crown of thorns, his hopes might be blasted and his joy, turned into sorrow by them. All his labor might be in vain. Their failure was his calamity. If he could not live in this world without them what would heaven be without them. Hence he the more diligently exhorts them. He does not spare that church that is always a source of joy to him. He does not exhort them because they are so bad but because they are so good; and